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ABSTRACT

The Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners have become a means to unify the career development community; assess the professional competencies of career practitioners; market the knowledge and skills sets of practitioners; and raise the profile of career development. This paper provides background information on the development of standards and guidelines for practitioners. The three phases of development, from electing a National Steering Committee, to linking organizations that would ultimately adopt the standards, to the field testing of options for implementing the standards in different contexts are all explained. The scope of the standards and guidelines are described and a model is presented which encompasses the core competencies. Suggestions are presented on how interested parties can participate in the field testing. (JDM)

Canadian Standards for Career Development Practitioners: Focus on Implementation

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Introduction

In January 2001 at the National Consultation for Career Development (NATCON), the Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners were officially launched. The launch culminated four years of development that involved a large segment of the career development community from all geographic regions of the country. The standards are already being used in a variety of ways, ranging from self-initiated professional development to formal curriculum design. During the proposed final phase of the project, systematic field testing will take place in order to assess the impact of the standards on career development practice in Canada. This paper provides a brief background of the initiative, overviews the consultative process used to develop the standards, and describes the implementation plans for the next phase of the project.

Scope of the Standards and Guidelines

In the fall of 1996, a National Assembly on Career Development Guidelines was convened. Stakeholders drawn from a broad cross-section of sectors involved in career development explored the possibility of establishing a collaborative process for creating national standards for career development practitioners. The assembly agreed that establishing national guidelines and standards would have a positive impact on career development and that there was enough collective goodwill to proceed. The assembly elected a National Steering Committee to:

- draft a framework for guidelines and standards,
- map out a model for the scope of career development, and
- identify uses, benefits, risks, and disadvantages of guidelines and standards.

The steering committee followed these principles:

- build on consensus,
- consult,
- focus on practitioners providing services directly to clients,
- recognize existing best practices, and
- include the diversity of roles and skill sets in the field.

The steering committee followed a stewardship model rather than a representative model. In a stewardship model, members present their unique perspectives as professionals in the field. They are not official voices of the organizations or associations with which they are involved. Instead, they are primarily concerned with what is best for the career development community. Members of the steering committee were drawn from a wide variety of areas so that there would be multiple views.

In the fall of 1997, a series of regional consultations were held. Approximately 1,250 people participated in 70 consultation groups conducted in eight provinces and one territory. Almost 900 feedback forms were returned, representing a return rate of about 70%. About 27% of the respondents were from community-based agencies, 23% were from the education sector, 15% were from mental health or rehabilitation settings, 10% were in private practice, and the rest were from a wide variety of sectors that provide career development services as part of their mandates.

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly in favour of proceeding to develop the guidelines and standards. Key findings were:

- over 80% of respondents thought that developing guidelines and standards would be in their best interests as well as those of their clients, the organizations for which they worked, the profession, and the general public;
- they thought the proposed framework made sense;
- they supported the idea of basing the standards on what practitioners actually did, rather than the training they took;
- they supported using a code of ethics as the foundation for the standards;
- in response to the question, "Would you support the next step, namely to develop, field-test, and validate national guidelines and standards for career development?" 93% indicated they were in favour of proceeding.

Phase 2

Phase 2 of the project began in spring 1998. As the project moved from Phase 1 to Phase 2, a second Assembly on Guidelines and Standards was held, and a new National Steering Committee

was selected, having about half its representation from the first steering committee to promote continuity and the remaining half comprising new people to provide a fresh perspective. A Stakeholder Liaison and Communication Council was formed to provide an explicit link to professional associations and other organizations that could ultimately adopt the standards. The work of developing and validating the standards was sub-contracted to ATEC, an Edmonton firm with extensive experience in developing professional standards.

Development of the standards began with a profile meeting to elaborate upon the basic framework that had been developed in Phase 1 of the project. There followed five regional focus groups where the standards were fleshed out, competencies for each standard were developed, and sample performance indicators were agreed to. During this time, the National Steering Committee was developing a set of ethical principles, a glossary of key terms, and an extensive communication strategy to keep the career development community involved with the project. The first draft of the resulting standards document, in both English and French, was distributed to the career development community for consultation in December 1999. A consultation kit was prepared to provide facilitators with background information on the project and to outline a suggested method for obtaining detailed feedback on the standards document. About 600 participants, from all geographic regions of the country, returned response forms from the consultation. In response to the "big picture" questions, 95% said the Guidelines and Standards did accurately depict what could be considered as good practice. Additionally, 86% found the structure of the standards sensible and relevant, and 90% said that as a whole, the standards were accurate and comprehensive. The results validated the content and the process used. At the same time, there were a multitude of specific suggestions for modifications, revisions, and additions to enhance the guidelines and standards.

Based on feedback from the consultation, the standards document was revised and given a "plain-language" edit. Then in November 2000, it was distributed for endorsement to participants in the regional focus groups and people who participated in the consultation. Again, overwhelming support was provided by the career development community, and based on that validation, the standards document was prepared for distribution. In order to reduce the environmental impact of producing and distributing a large document, and to make the

final product easily used by practitioners, the steering committee decided on a CD-ROM format as the publishing medium. Thus, when the Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners were launched, we had CD (career development) on CD (CD-ROM).

A word of clarification

During this same time, a companion initiative, the Blueprint for Life/Work Designs, was unfolding. The Guidelines and Standards and Blueprint initiatives are independent, but very complementary. The Blueprint is a national effort to be clear about the client outcomes associated with quality career development programs and services. They specify what individuals can expect to learn from services at different developmental levels, ranging from elementary school, to secondary, and adult populations. The Blueprint also has a strong focus on implementing career development programs and helping providers be clear about the outcomes actually achieved by specific programs. The Guidelines and Standards initiative focuses on outlining the competencies that practitioners need in order to deliver quality career development services.

Phase 3

Phase 3, now in the final stages of planning, is intended to extend until June 2003, and is described in more detail later in this paper. Phase 3 will focus on systematically field testing several options for implementing the standards in a broad range of different contexts, serving a wide range of purposes.

Scope of the Standards and Guidelines

In this initiative, *career development practitioner* refers to those who spend most of their time giving direct services to clients in:

- self-exploration and personal management,
- learning and work exploration, and
- career building with individuals, groups, and communities.

These practitioners include, but are not limited to, counsellors, career advisors, job marketers, community trainers, teachers, psychologists, educational planners, and social workers.

Career development is an umbrella term that may include at least the following:

- career education,
- career counselling,
- employment counselling,
- human resource development,
- training in employment skills,
- training in personal but job-related areas, such as job-search, interviewing, self-exploration, time management and anger management, entrepreneurship, and
- community rehabilitation.

Career development is provided in schools, post-secondary institutions, private vocational colleges, community-based agencies, the offices of private practitioners, federal and provincial government departments, organizations like Workers' Compensation, private agencies, human resources departments in larger businesses, and joint labour-business partnerships.

This brief overview is not exhaustive but it does provide a flavour of what career development is and mentions some of the more common places where practitioners do career development work. It is intended to help people locate themselves in the standards document and to begin thinking about how the standards can help them identify the knowledge and skills they have.

In Phase 1 of the project, a framework for Guidelines and Standards was developed, revised in consultation with the field, and used in a national consultation in the fall of 1997. Three decisions influenced the nature of the framework.

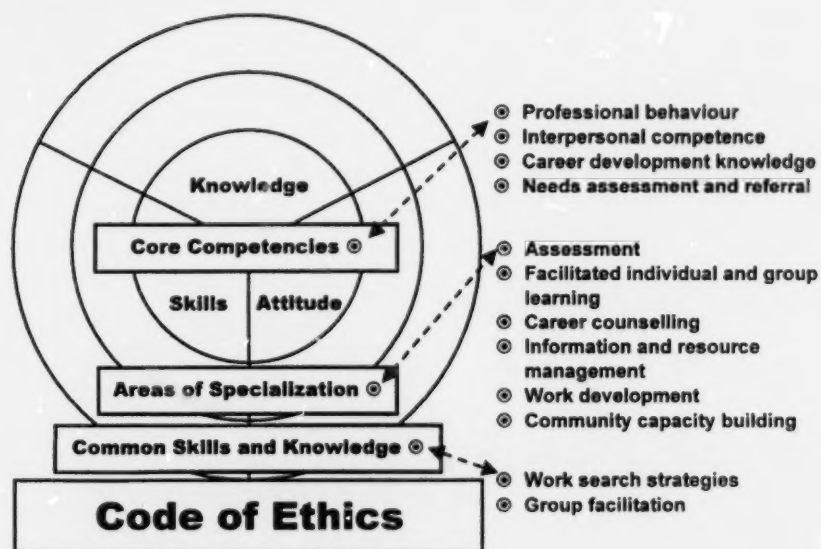
1. Build the framework on the common points of existing models.
2. Focus on competencies needed to provide direct services to clients.
3. Concentrate on what service providers need to do to offer quality services to clients. This approach was chosen for several reasons:
 - it identifies activities that professionals perform and is therefore easily understood by both practitioners and clients;
 - it recognizes that people become skilled in different ways and addresses what people can do, rather than how they learned to do it;

- it lends itself readily to prior learning assessment and recognition, and it allows for recognition that competency can be gained through formal training;
- it is closely tied to competencies specific to career development.

Based on these Concepts, the model depicted in fig. 1 was developed. It contains three types of competencies and uses a code of ethics as a foundation.

Figure 1

Competency Model for Career Development Standards and Guidelines



Core Competencies

Core competencies are the skills, knowledge, and attitudes common to all career development practitioners, regardless of their employment setting. In some work settings, core competencies may be sufficient to deliver the range of services provided. Other work settings may require service providers with competency in one or more of the specialty areas. In a setting

offering comprehensive career development services, each staff member would have the core competencies. In addition, the staff as a whole would likely possess all of the specialty competencies needed to deliver comprehensive services. Individual staff members could, however, differ in their specialty areas.

Areas of Specialization

Areas of specialization are additional skills, knowledge, and attitudes that may be required, depending on the type of work setting and the client groups that are being served. These competencies vary according to the nature of the specific service provided and the client needs being addressed. Service providers may have the competencies and therefore meet the standards in one or more areas of specialization, depending on the nature of their duties and the services they provide. Six main areas of specialization have been identified:

- assessment,
- facilitated individual and group learning,
- career counselling,
- information and resource management,
- work development, and
- community capacity building.

All career development practitioners will need to have a certain number of basic competencies in all six areas of specialization. These basic competencies appear in the Core and are also included as basic competencies in the appropriate area of specialization. Specializations, of course, have many additional competencies specific to each specialization. For example, all career development practitioners will need to have a certain amount of competence in the area of assessment (Core). Assessment specialists have this Core, as well as additional and advanced assessment competencies.

Common skills and knowledge consist of competencies in more than one area of specialization, but not in all. Initial field-testing of the standards document revealed that some competencies were relevant to more than one area of specialization. Rather than list these competencies as part of each Area of Specialization, they are grouped together and called Common Skills and Knowledge.

The core and specialty areas are equally valued. There is no hierarchy intended between core and specialty or among the

specializations. No area is seen as more, or less, important than any others. All competency areas are important in providing comprehensive career development services to clients.

Indirect Services to Clients (an Aside)

There are important areas of work associated with the provision of quality career development services that do not involve direct contact with clients. For example, a person involved in gathering and analyzing labour market information might never actually interact directly with clients seeking career development assistance. However, the information provided by such a person will be vitally important to the service provider. Similarly, a person who develops self-exploration tools for clients might not be involved in providing services to clients, but the results of his or her work will be used by service providers in meeting client needs. These are "Indirect Services" and can be organized into several categories, such as:

- development of programs, services, and resources;
- research and evaluation;
- marketing;
- administration of programs and services; and
- advocacy.

Standards for those who provide indirect services are beyond the scope of the current initiative. However, these services play an indispensable role in the provision of quality career development services to clients. In many cases, the results of the work of those who provide indirect services to clients are part of the knowledge needed by those who provide direct services. For example, a person who teaches job search skills to clients may not need to know how to gather and organize labour market information, but will need to know how to access the finished product and how to relay that information to clients. The decision to focus this initiative on those who provide direct services to clients is not intended to undervalue the essential nature of those who provide indirect services. It is simply the attempt to make sure the initiative addresses a manageable goal.

Implementing Standards for Career Development Practitioners

In Phase 3 of the Canadian Standards initiative, a series of strategic pilot tests is proposed in selected settings across the

country. These "systematic field tests" will promote the use of the standards and provide information on the utility of various ways of applying the standards to specific work and professional development situations. The pilot trials will focus on validating the current documents and using the standards in creative ways. These might include:

1. Training programs
 - identifying gaps in existing training
 - using the standards as a template for curriculum development
2. Self-assessment of skills by practitioners
 - developing a portfolio of areas of competence
 - using the standards as a first step in a professional development plan
3. Performance appraisal model
 - identifying which competencies apply to my job
 - tracking competencies across time to determine professional growth
 - using the standards as a template for planning practitioner professional development
 - hiring guidelines for employers
4. Professional associations
 - formal endorsement of the standards
 - creating a specialization for career development
5. Quality assurance of scope of services
 - using the standards to identify service gaps
 - documenting the credentials of staff to deliver comprehensive services
 - developing policies to support use of the standards

The plan is to use the Stakeholder Liaison and Communication Council and the network of participants in the focus groups and field consultations to provide at least four to five field tests of each of the possible uses of the standards document mentioned above and other uses that are identified as Phase 3 unfolds. The plan is for each type of use to be validated in several regions of the country and if possible with several different types of career development practitioners and in contexts involving several different client groups. A new National Steering Committee has been formed, composed of

people from previous steering committees and new members who are key advocates for the project. The role of the new steering committee will be to coordinate and direct Phase 3 of the project.

As part of Phase 3, the following specific products and support materials will be developed:

- a matrix depicting uses of the standards, the contexts in which they were used, the purposes for which they were used, the geographic regions where they were used, and the types of evidence gathered to document usage;
- a computer-managed tool that could be used by practitioners, employers, or accreditation bodies, for self-assessment, professional development planning, or gathering evidence of competency;
- an evaluation framework and a series of evaluation protocols that can be used to evaluate the use and impact of the standards;
- a marketing kit that could be used to promote the standards to organizations, professional groups, individual practitioners, and the public;
- a guide for implementing the standards, outlining implementation options, indicating steps to be followed in implementing each option, and common "do's" and "don'ts";
- a monograph outlining promising practices in the use of the standards, based directly on the results of the field tests;
- a guidebook for prior learning assessment and recognition that could be used for assessing practitioner competencies and training experiences; and
- a revised and updated standards document.

Conclusion

The Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners has become a means to unify the career development community, assess the professional competencies of career practitioners, market the knowledge and skills sets of practitioners, and raise the profile of career development in

Canada. The implementation described above will result in a sustainable mechanism for implementing the standards, monitoring their use, and evaluating the impact of the standards on the profession and the general public. A decision on funding for Phase 3 is expected in the early spring of 2001, and the implementation trials are expected to begin in the fall of 2001. People interested in participating in field testing are invited to visit the website for more details and to register their interest. Copies of all background materials, consultation kits, and regular updates on the initiative also are available on the website: <http://www.career-dev-guidelines.org>.